

Christmas Past in the Present

By Dorie Billich

Curator, Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum, thanks to the Museum's talented volunteer elves.

Our log cabin, in keeping with the isolated and trying conditions of the pioneer era, has been modestly decked out with pine and sumac swags and a carved wooden nativity scene. The Brown House is a picture of Victorian opulence: romantic cedar ropes accented with lace doilies, dried flowers, high bush cranberries, pine cones and ribbons adorn doorways and the staircase; the dinner table is set for the evening meal with handcrafted crackers and an epergne cascading with nuts and fruit.

The Christmas tree in the parlour is packed with handcrafted ornaments, strings of popcorn and cranberries, and miniature candles in crimped tin holders.

Over 600 students from grades 3 through 8 will experience the spirit of Christmas past at the Museum this year. Through their tour of the restored buildings, they learn how our Christmas traditions developed through the 1800s, and have the opportunity to share and compare their families' midwinter celebrations while also seeing just how our settlers lived in a time before electricity.

A session in the restored classroom enables students to experience firsthand the rote learning and multi-grade atmosphere of the one room school-

house. The students' day also includes a hands-on activity with a project - a woven mat or Christmas ornaments - to take home.

Families can enjoy the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of a 19th Century Christmas during the Museum's A Candlelight Christmas on Saturday, Dec. 10. This enchanting evening tour, generously sponsored by Powell Contracting of Gormley, includes a horse-drawn wagon ride through the adjacent Vandorf Park, a visit to the pioneer log cabin to enjoy a story and gingerbread cookies, and a tour through the Victorian farmhouse to admire the tree and sample a sweet or two.


The evening concludes with a reception where all can warm up with hot apple cider and traditional baking. Space is limited so advance tickets are required. The 7:30 p.m. tour has already sold out but space is available on the 6:00 p.m. tour. Call the Museum at 905-727-8954 or toll free at 1-888-290-0337 for more information or to purchase your tickets by credit card.


The Museum is open to the public Monday through Friday, 1:00-5:00 p.m. during the winter, but closed from Dec. 24 to Jan. 2. The authentic Christmas decorations can be enjoyed until Thursday, Dec. 22 and we recommend coming after 2:30 p.m. when our programs for school groups have finished for the day - it'll be much less crowded! Admission is free, but donations are gratefully accepted.




Photo by Kate Gilderdale

Anita Craib, Anna Wize, Julie Coleman and Susie Farkas were part of an enthusiastic crowd attending Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum's perennially popular Victorian Tea on Nov. 25.

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• Renewed Hope (I know I am stretching it): For many of us, Celebrating a Birth that occurred 2000 yrs ago. A Birth that signified new life for mankind. Though the event is old, the significance for Christmas always remains fresh. Whatever your belief system, I hope this time of year will help you to regain and renew a sense of wonder and gratitude. Being a festive time, I hope it provides great opportunities to renew friendships and family ties.

Merry Christmas!

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